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ABSTRACT

Achieving equality and quality in schooling is the greatest educational need of the 1980s. Three state and federal actions are necessary to facilitate this. They are: (1) an acknowledgement of the direct connection between education and employment; (2) a specification of performance levels by high school students in life competencies; and (3) a means to relate funding to reasonable levels of basic skills performance. National policy should link employment skills acquired in school to job opportunities. Federal legislation should provide a system to plan for each individual student and guarantee employment as a last resort. States should have elementary schools link student expectations, texts, tests, and report cards together and provide money to upgrade staff. High schools should assess students' skills in the tenth grade, band together to provide different employment options for students, and link themselves, the job market, and placement together. (SAS)

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A STATEMENT SUBMITTED
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by
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ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION NEEDS FOR THE 1980's

PREPARED FOR THE
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SECONDARY EDUCATION
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ELEMENTARY, SECONDARY AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION NEEDS FOR THE 1980's

The greatest education need for the 1980's is to achieve equality and quality in the schooling process. There are currently too many children and youth who are not performing at "acceptable" levels. There are currently insufficient indicators to assure parents and taxpayers that "excellence" is being achieved among many public school students. There is a need in the 1980's to bring state departments of education, school districts and colleges of education together to work more closely to achieve equality and quality successes during the next decade.

Specifically, there are three state and federal actions which will be necessary if the educational establishment is to be simulated to meet the above stated needs. They are as follows:

--- First, state and federal policy will have to acknowledge a direct relationship between educational attainment and employment opportunity.

--- Second, state and federal policy will have to specify the acceptable levels of performance by secondary students in the Life Role Competencies.

--- Third, state and federal policy will have to relate federal and state funding programs such as Title I, and ESEA to reasonable levels of basic skills performance.

If the public school is to maintain its position within society and regain its creditability among the masses, there must occur a direct relationship between one's education and one's employment during the decade of the 1980's. Such a public policy action could be the most significant domestic accomplishment of the 1980's.

A unique solution to the nation's perplexing equation is postulated in this proposal. On one side of the equation we have observed the inability of many high schools to meet the needs of those poor performing students (PPS) in the lower half of the normal distribution curve (NDC), the result being increased criticism of the public schools. On the other side of the equation is high youth unemployment (HYU), most characteristic among minorities because of a lack of jobs (LOJ) resulting in increased dependency on social services.

$$PPS + NDC = HYU + LOJ$$

To equalize both sides of the equation one must remove the evils of the normal distribution curve by instituting criterion performance measures of acceptability, but achievement of acceptability must assure job opportunities which lead to youth employment.

Serious attention to this formula would result in a tremendous impact upon the nation's public secondary schools, while at the same time maintaining a respectable standard for job placement.

With this perspective and equation formulation I come to this discussion of elementary, secondary and vocational education needs in the 1980's, particularly among minorities, from three separate vantage points--as former President of the Council of Chief State School Officers, as a former member of the President's National Commission on Employment Policy, and as a member of the National Advisory Council on Social Security.

These experiences at the national level have led me to conclude that there are three primary segments of American life--education, employment, and entitlement (a decent standard of living at retirement)--and that they must now be linked.

Not until very recently, in fact only within the past 25 years, has one's education become, in my opinion, one of the primary segments of American life--for those who have traditionally been in the lower half of the normal distribution curve.

Until the historic U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1954, the schools of the nation were primarily charged with the task of screening, sorting and selecting. For those who were not inclined for whatever reason to succeed in the schools, they could through World War II find employment in unskilled jobs, farming, or domestic work, which did not require acquisition of secondary school competencies. In addition, the technological revolution which also developed within the past quarter of a century has increased the need for all secondary students to acquire life role competencies.

The fact is there are some new and unique changes around us and among us that just did not exist before 1950 and are unparalleled in our history as a nation:

1. There is television to influence our minds.
2. There are jet airplanes to quickly transport us.
3. There are computers that monitor and mesmerize us.
4. There are transistors to amuse us.
5. There are freeway mazes to zip us to the suburbs.
6. There are shopping malls of plenty and convenience.
7. There are visitations to the moon and exploration of space.
8. There are discotheques influencing behavior.
9. There are Holiday Inns and many motor inns to accomodate travelers.
10. There are credit cards to purchase our pleasures.
11. There are frozen foods and bountiful supermarkets that have changed our family habits.
12. And McDonald's and the fast food craze that have changed the way we eat.

Over half of all Americans take these events for granted, as if they always existed and the other half fail to appreciate their full implications upon the schooling process. These market place conveniences did not exist for whites or blacks, rich or poor, north or south, prior to the second half of the 20th century.

These market place conveniences have brought into the homes of the masses a perception of the good life on Mainstreet U.S.A., and have raised the level of

aspiration of those previously screened out of the schools. That, in essence, is what the challenge of the 1980's is about.

There is an urgent need to formulate a national policy framework on youth and young adult employment which can be used to evaluate specific programs and proposals.

The first principle of such a framework is whether there should be a direct relationship between a high school student acquiring employability skills and a job opportunity. I believe there should be.

Such a framework was formulated in 1935 as public policy when the nation decided there should be a direct relationship between employment and an entitlement to a decent retirement level by enacting into law the Social Security System.

Since education, employment and entitlement have emerged, in my opinion, as the three most critical segments of American life and correspond very closely to present life cycles, it seems inevitable that these three segments now be directly linked. Even today, 1979, forty-four years later two of the major issues in terms of the linkage between employment and entitlement are universal coverage and equity for women. It may take another 50 years to interface education and employment, even if we begin now.

Since Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka in 1954, the role of the school has been dramatically changed. Although education continues to be valued and a high premium in the nation, the institution that delivers a large proportion of that education, the public school, is not as highly valued.

One principle reason for this current dilemma is that the public school has always been regarded in the past as the nation's "great screener" rather than the nation's "great equalizer," and in this regard the public has been well served by the public school.

There is, however, an urgent need to link education and employment. Such a linkage currently exists between our school systems and the higher education institutions in terms of federal assistance and state programs.

In this respect, the declining birth rate may lead to a change in the supply/demand picture for youth and young adults, further aggravating the situation.

Without an established linkage now those in the lower half of the normal curve, the minorities in disproportionate numbers may find themselves further disadvantaged, and the role of the public school further weakened.

After two years of hearings, meetings and reports, the Youth Task Force of the National Commission on Employment Policy made seven recommendations in regard to what should take place in terms of a federal initiative.

Although it may take many years to fashion a comprehensive linkage between education and employment, the need for a national youth employment policy framework is now.

Furthermore, I believe three ingredients toward such a framework could be established by federal legislation that would require:

1. An agreement on and measurable employability skills.
2. Each senior high school receiving federal funds to prepare an individual employability plan for each student.
3. Those students at graduation who were certified externally that they possessed employability competencies would be guaranteed jobs by the states. This could be implemented by federal legislation providing matching funds to states that became the employer of last resort for all 18 through 21 year olds. The first responsibility of the state would be to assist those who apply to locate jobs in the private sector. Only after that effort failed would the state be required to contract in the public sector or generate jobs.

The establishment of employability skills as the first of the three components is not as difficult as some would lead us to believe. In Michigan we have identified one dozen employability skills essential for success in the world of work:

1. Functional reading skills
2. Effective writing skills
3. Effective verbal skills
4. Practical computational skills
5. Ability to follow directions
6. Ability to project mental alertness and physical soundness
7. Punctuality
8. Report to assignments consistently
9. Enthusiasm for one's assignment
10. Sense of suitable and appropriate attire
11. Applying and understanding requirements of the job
12. Ability to get along with others

The first six of these employability skills can be measured through utilization of our 10th grade state assessment of student needs test, and our 12th grade employability and occupational skills test will measure through on the job training and observation the remaining six employability skills.

Many states are now moving toward the improvement of secondary education through additional funding and specificity of a different curriculum for all students.

As we in Michigan begin to look at the issues facing the senior high schools in our state, we see the steps that have to be undertaken to improve the ability of the schools to respond to all their students:

--- First, there must be an assessment of the students' basic skills as they come into the 10th grade.

--- Second, there must be several different options for students to fulfill the overall goals of the school and community.

--- Third, there must be life role competencies, e.g., those skills in occupational and employability endeavors, aesthetic and humanistic appreciations, civic and social responsibilities, and personal and family management taught in the schools that prepare students for adult life, available to all the schools in the state, and there must be a means of assessing students' performance in those competencies.

--- Fourth, there must be incentive available to the senior high schools to encourage them to implement the life role competencies into their school program.

--- Fifth, there must be incentives to bring together small high schools in an effort to have them provide a variety of educational and employment opportunities that have an economy of scale that is beneficial to students.

--- And sixth, there must be a vital link between the schools, job opportunities and job placement.

We are a nation of 17,000 autonomous school districts, with 50 states and six territories that supervise public instruction. There currently exists no public linkage in this decentralized mechanism, even though as a nation our employment problems, our energy problems, and our technological advances tend to force the entire nation toward a single direction.

Such a plan would have long term economic development implications and to procrastinate may shift the emphasis in such a way that the development process is lost. The current youth unemployment problem is more than just a supply and demand issue, and should be addressed in its fullest sense.

I have suggested specific steps that could be taken to meet the vocational education needs of youth in the 1980's and also specific steps to revitalize secondary education for those who in the past have not performed at acceptable levels in high school.

At the elementary level the problems of basic skills attainment and acceptable levels of performance are being solved, but there are two specific actions needed to accelerate the current pace.

--- First is the need to bring about a direct linkage between (1) student expectations, (2) textbooks purchased, (3) tests used, and (4) report cards sent home. In most schools these are not now directly linked, making the schooling process difficult for the disadvantaged child and confusing for the parent.

--- Second is the need to direct more funding into the retraining and upgrading of school staffs. Because of the decline in the student population and the increased attainment of graduate credit for state certification, the current school personnel force will lack individual incentives for acquiring new knowledge and skills even though the new laws demand such.

I began this position paper by stating the three major state and federal actions needed in the 1980's to bring about equality and quality. I then talked about the specifics for vocational education, secondary education and finally elementary education. I wish now to return to the issue of youth and young adult employment problems because I believe that the reform of elementary, secondary and vocational education will take place only to the extent that the nation reforms its youth-young adult employment policy.

At present the national policy is that to do good in elementary and secondary is to get into colleges, thus we spend billions for grants and scholarships and have elaborate counseling services. If one fails to elect college or the military and does not have family connections in the business world, he or she is virtually on his or her own.

This national policy permeates the elementary and secondary schools and prohibits any significant long-lasting reforms. This is the major reason that I was very pleased that the National Commission on Employment Policy realized a need to get involved in the area and created a Youth Task Force to study possible approaches. Chairman Eli Ginzberg and the Commission Director Isabel Sawhill are to be commended.

In its examination of youth employment problems, the Youth Task Force concluded that the problems of youth unemployment, especially minority youth unemployment, can be traced to the failure of many youth to acquire basic skills or to develop employability skills. These failures can be attributed to several causes. The Task Force concluded that not all of the causes can be attacked on all fronts and that efforts must be concentrated on programs and institutions that are amendable to federal policy initiatives.

The Task Force's seven interrelated recommendations are designed to lead to improved educational attainment and enhanced employability development for future generations of young people who, in the absence of such programs, are likely to experience the same employment problems as their predecessors.

The recommendations of the Task Force are recapitulated as follows:

--- The Youth Task Force's first recommendation is that a new amendment to the career education act be enacted in a federal law providing matching grants to state education agencies to be utilized by school districts to implement such programs.*

--- The Youth Task Force's second recommendation is that more detailed studies of the interrelationship between economic development and inner city employment/unemployment should be undertaken by the federal agencies, including the National Commission for Employment Policy, with the intent to discover additional means of providing job opportunities in nontraditional ways.

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*"Such program" refers to expanded career awareness, vocational exploration and experienced-based education programs.

--- The Task Force's third recommendation is that work-study and other work experience programs involving the payment of wages or allowances from federal funds, be targeted by residence and income to the economically disadvantaged, defining economically disadvantaged students as those who are from families whose income does not exceed 100% of the lower living standard income level.

--- The Task Force's fourth recommendation is that the federal government should continue to encourage different kinds of services and mixes of services, but that a specific federal agency should be designated to determine those programs which work best in terms of placing youth in the private sector and in terms of the retention of such youth on jobs in the private sector.

--- The Task Force's fifth recommendation is to consolidate the various youth programs, with the exception of the entitlement demonstration, into one youth title with a single eligibility criterion, and to provide monies for the program on an advance funding basis. Such a change would allow the prime sponsors the flexibility they need to provide comprehensive services tailored to the needs of their youth population and the resources available locally.

--- The Task Force's sixth recommendation is the establishment of a federal requirement that the states under a matching grant program become employers of the last resort in those cases where: (1) young people have completed regular school or have completed a program under an employment and training activity; (2) have had their employability certified by the United States Employment Service; and (3) with state assistance are unable to find regular, unsubsidized employment.

--- The Task Force's seventh and final recommendation is that any agency requesting funding for training programs certify in advance that they agree with the established common standards of measurable program effectiveness in terms of basic skill and employability skill attainment. Certification of such attainment is to be determined by an agency external to the grant recipient and prime sponsor.

It may take the federal government several years to discuss appropriate strategies for implementing these recommendations, but in the state of Michigan, as I noted earlier, efforts have been moving steadily toward attainment of the principle of an identifiable set of employability skills, and individual employability plan for each senior high school student, and the state becoming the employer of the last resort.

Legislation has been drafted for introduction in the 1980 legislative session to implement both concepts: The employability skills in 1980, the Individual Employability Plan (IEP) in the fall of 1981, and the state as employer of last resort in 1983. Copies of the proposed legislation are available upon request.

Whether states utilize the idea of education-work council as proposed by Willard Wirtz in terms of job identification and the employment service for job placement is optional.

The primary principle being pursued by these proposals is not complicated or difficult to comprehend:

FIRST: Public high schools must be given more support if they are to better respond to the heterogeneity that now exists among their clients.

SECOND: Youth and young adults must be made aware of the specific criteria that is expected of them as they enter senior high schools in this era of competency testing.

THIRD: States that require youngsters to stay in school from 6 to 16, must assume a new role of being required to assist those youth 16 to 18 who acquire employability skills to get jobs if that is an option which they pursue.

There is nothing "welfarist" about this proposal. It is embedded in the best traditions of education accountability and the principles of our capitalistic enterprise, and is the most direct means of responding to the elementary, secondary and vocational education needs of the 1980's.